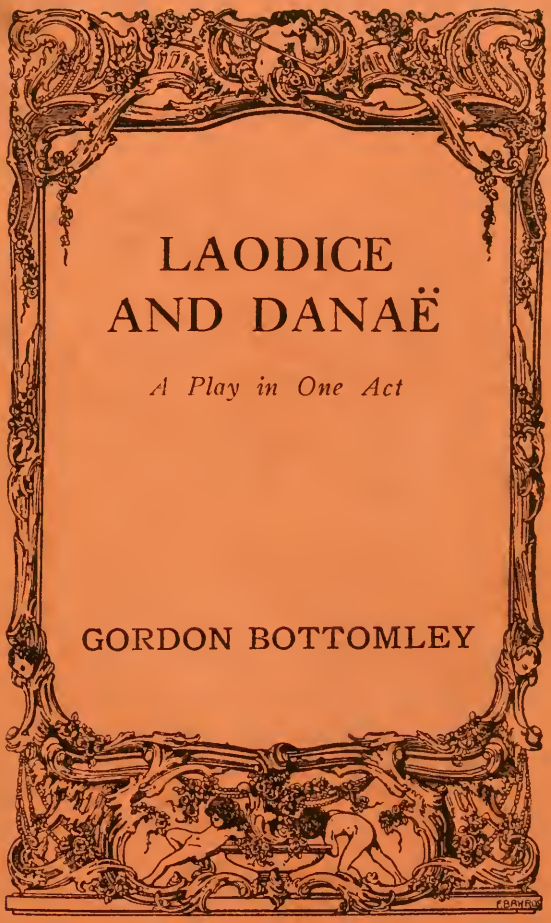
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LAODICE AND DANAË

A Play in One Act

GORDON BOTTOMLEY

LAODICE AND DANAË

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LAODICE AND DANAË

PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

GORDON BOTTOMLEY



Boston
The Four Seas Company
1916

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To B. J. FLETCHER

O rare Ben Fletcher, oft I bless
Your rotund Jacobean name;
If the great crew could still express
Their hearts in their dim place of Fame,
As once at Globe or Mermaid-ales,
With love your liking they would greet
For country things and queens' mad tales
And lines with sounding feet.

But in this troublous newer time
Such fellows have not filled your days,
So it is left for me to chime
These quieter verses of your praise:
For a fair theme I need not strive
While manhood knows as boyhood knew
The joys of art, the joys of life,
I have received from you.

What days could ever be so long
As those our pristine Summers poised
O'er a charmed valley isled among
Their bright slow-breaking tides unnoised?
Then Dials *were new and came to stir*
A passionate thirst within the eyes;

Each dawn was a discoverer
Of poets unearthly wise.

First-comer of my friends, the years
Behold much friendship fade and set;
The shrunken world imparts its fears,
Most men their early power forget.
But art stays true for us, and we
In it are steadfast: for a sign
Its wonder joins us changelessly
Your name stands here with mine.

ARGUMENT

Antiochus Theos, one of the Hellenic Kings of the East of the line of Seleucus, reigned in Antioch. He had espoused Laodice his kinswoman, according to the usage of his race; but after many years he put her from him, and took to wife Berenice, daughter and sister of Ptolemys of Egypt, for reasons of state.

Laodice withdrew to Ephesus and kept court there: long affection, resurgent, sent Antiochus thither to join her. Shortly afterward he died at Ephesus in Laodice's care.

Berenice and Laodice then warred, each to gain the kingdom for her child: the infant son of Berenice disappeared, and eventually Seleucus II., the son of Laodice, held the throne of Antiochus.

In the course of their wars Laodice retired from Ephesus on finding that Sophron, the governor of the city, secretly trafficked with the party of Berenice. While she sat in some adjacent city Sophron unsuspiciously rejoined her councils; she immediately devised his death, but he, being warned by his old love Danaë, the queen's favorite, saved himself by flight.

Persons

Laodice, a Queen of the Seleucid House in Asia.

Danaë, Mysta, Rhodogune, Barsine, and other waiting-women.

Sophron, Seleucid Governor of Ephesus.

In Smyrna. B. C. 246.

LAODICE AND DANAË

LAODICE AND DANAË

Behind the curtain a woman sings to the accompaniment of a harp and a bell.

MAIDEN born in a dance
Looking first on the moon
Between camellias
(Rose seen white in the chance),
Solemn the bough-hung space
Dim for the white hurt mother
Whose feet still twitched to the tune
That gleamed in the throbbing smother
Of light, the murmur of feet
And touching of ankle-rings.
So strange and far the heat,
Compelling rhythms, words lost,
Vapours of odours, strings
Of pearls that swung and tost
Under eyes' retreat....
The stars go down in ones;
Night air lifts long leaves
That let a star drop through,
Shut on it as dew runs
And the vanished light receives....
The new-born eyes shut too....

The curtain rises

A lofty chamber of mingled Hellenic and Asiatic architecture is seen. The walls are of black stone; on

the right a portal toward the front of the stage is concealed by a curtain embroidered with parrots and Babylonian branch-work; high and toward the back is a double window, with open cedar lattices, of an inner room: high in the opposed wall is a short arcade with a projecting gallery. An open colonnade extends across the rear wall at two thirds of its height; its pillars support the roof: the platform of this colonnade is accessible by an open stair recessed in the wall.

Queen Laodice reclines on a great divan set toward the left centre of the chamber. The musicians whose singing and playing have just ceased kneel on a Persian carpet before her: between them and the portals stands a tall brazier whence a wavering heat rises. A golden evening sky is visible through the colonnade, where Danaë leans against a pillar.

LAODICE.

Be silent now; I let you sing too much,
I am awaiting now too many things
To bear this fret of waiting till you end
And I can think again. Be quietly gone.

The women go out.

DANAË.

You bade them sing to make one moment brief.

LAODICE.

What are you watching like a larger cat,
Sweetheart, little heart, noiseless and alert?
You shall not watch me like a prim wise cat.

DANAË.

I watch a girl sway slightly, near the tide,
As if rehearsing dance-steps in her heart;
She hangs lit snakes of sea-weed down her bosom;
She takes a letter from her bunchy hair....
She laughs and leans over, holding the pillar.

LAODICE.

Find me a ship, ships—dark ones, strange ones—
I must have ships, so find them, little heart.
And, more than all, a ship of Antioch.

DANAË.

How tiny a girl looks under these deep rocks....
Laodice yawns.
Madam, I have searched well; yet until now
No deep-sea ship has passed the promontory;
Now a great ship with tawny sails comes on,
An ocean-threatening centaur for its prow.

LAODICE.

That is from Ephesus, not Antioch....
I purge one thought thereby and make repayment.
I am taken with an inward shivering:
Perhaps I am cold with night—come down and warm me.
Danaë descends and reclines by Laodice.
Haughty and passive and obedient,
May not my queen's bosom receive your head?
When I worked empery in Ephesus
That Sophron, governor—did he not love you?

DANAË.
He said he did.

LAODICE.
And you?

DANAË.
I said he did.
Thereon he made too sure of me too soon:
It is unwise to let men be too sure,
And for that reason I hung up my silks
On a swart Nabatæan, having smeared her
With my rare private unguent, and concealed her
In his choice corner—where she bit his lip,
Then let her laughing teeth take light of moon.
There was no more of Sophron afterward....
Although I looked at him almost penitently....

LAODICE.
No more? Was there no more, my little one?

DANAË.
Ah, yes.... When he would never look at me
I felt I could not live outside his arms.
I went to him at night in a slave's skirt,
And by humiliating actions soothed
His wincing mind, until he stooped to me.
I had him soon. And then I tired of him.

LAODICE.
And then, indeed, there was no more at all?

DANAË.

I have not seen him since. We left that city.
You have my faith. You know I am all yours.

LAODICE.

That is quite well. He has no years for you;
He is found treasonous and must be undone.
O, he goes out..... Dear, I am very cold.
Is it because my heart is cold? Men say it.

DANAË.

Your heart is warm to me.

LAODICE.

What do men say?

DANAË.

They say you fled to Sardis and to Smyrna
Because you poisoned him at Ephesus
And heard his feet when a room echoed.

LAODICE.

Him?

DANAË.

Antiochus the God, your king and spouse.

LAODICE.

Why do they so consider me the cause?

DANAË.

You hold the physician Smerdis in more favour.

LAODICE.

And did I poison him, my Danaë?

DANAË.

Dear lady, surely.

LAODICE.

Surely..... It is sure.
Was I not made the Sister, natural wife?
Did he not change me for a daughter of Egypt
Robed with a satrapy, crowned by an isle?
She laved her body daily in Nile water,
Which can make fruitful even stones and virgins;
It soon brought forth the mud's accustomed spawn
And valuable heir of all the lands.
How could she keep him? Needing me he turned—
Was it not best to die still needing me,
And save the amount of kingdoms for my boy,
The climbing vine of gold up Shushan's front,
The cedar palaces of Ecbatana?
Though Berenice sits in Antioch
Safe with her suckling, in her suckling's name....
Winds, bring to me a ship from Antioch.
Since that dread night when Mysta stept not down
With all you speechless ones to disarray me,
Have you not dreamed that I did poison her?
Her love is more than yours, for she had crept
To Antioch to sell herself in bondage
Where Berenice buys, that she may nurse
The child for Berenice—and for me,
While uncle Egypt plucks my crown for it.

DANAË.

Which fingers mixed the poison? See, I kiss them,
Trust them ever to do their will with me.
There is no poison in a poppy seed;

The seedling draws its venom from the earth—
'Tis the earth's natural need for such event.

LAODICE.

Ay, but the disposition is in the seed;
I poison by a motion of the heart.

Rhodogune, a Parthian waiting-woman, enters.

RHODOGUNE.

Madam, the governor of Ephesus
Come newly from the harbour to your will.

DANAË.

Sophron!

LAODICE.

Lie still.

A silence.

RHODOGUNE.

Madam, must I go down?

LAODICE.

Bid this Ephesian governor to me.

Rhodogune goes out. Laodice lays a hand on Danaë's heart.

It is now twilight. Sophron enters.

SOPHRON.

Queen, am I swift enough to your commanding?

LAODICE.

I am ever rich in your discerning service.
Why came you by the sea?

She sees that Sophron's gaze is fixed on Danaë, who does not look at him.

Girl, stand behind me.

Danaë obeys.

Why came you by the sea?

SOPHRON.

Lady.... the sea?....

LAODICE.

Does not the way by land still fit mine urgence?

SOPHRON.

Your safety's urgence made it seem most good
To search the straits for masts of Ptolemy.

LAODICE.

Ha.... Yes.... And did you speak with any such?

Danaë looks at Sophron and shakes her head.

SOPHRON.

The seas were void of alien keels to-night.

LAODICE.

Are there Egyptians seen in Ephesus?

SOPHRON.

None since the aged men who mummied the king.

LAODICE.

Tell me the common talk of Egypt's plan;
And what device to handle Ptolemy.

SOPHRON.

There's but a common fear of Egypt's secret.
We cannot meet him yet unless the cities,
Yea all these cities of men, take hands with us.

LAODICE.

Must I keep house in Smyrna still, my man?
Play queen in a corner harmlessly?

SOPHRON.

Madam,
The coast is safer here than Ephesus,
Retreat on Sardis safer and more ready.

LAODICE.

I more withdrawn apart from my main kingdom,
Baffled from drainage of the unended East.
I have required you here because a word,
Perhaps a word malicious, has crept here:
It has been said that some Ephesian men
Have bartered for my town with Ptolemy—
Do you know any of these? Do they live?

SOPHRON.

There are none known: such could not sell past me.

LAODICE.

They use my palace: examine those about you.

SOPHRON.

There is no need: I know them to be clean.

Danaë again shakes her head, but more eagerly.

LAODICE, *turning her head and looking up at Danaë suddenly.*

Why do you tremble, girl? There's nought to fear.
As she begins to speak Danaë's hair is shaken loose; a rose falls from it and breaks on Laodice's shoulder. Laodice laughs and plays with the petals, continuing without pause.
Do you drop me a sleepy kiss, maiden, my rare one?
But O, you have so tumbled your hair to cull it—
Come hither, kneel and I will bind it up.

DANAË, *obeying.*

Lady, I coiled it carelessly..... Indeed
Such ministration is my precious pardon.

LAODICE.

Silk, silky silk so delicious to finger....
Rose I held; ruby-glows; then dark hair in my hands....
Nay, I am hot; I burn; stay there and fan me....
Dear, do not cease at all.
To Sophron.
Well, my captain?

SOPHRON.

You shall have men's minds searched in Ephesus.

LAODICE.

I like your mind. Also, I have considered
You must shut up your port, let out no ship;
Then Ptolemy shall be more sure each night
That he has wiped the seas.... till you slip out.

SOPHRON, *in stupefaction.*
Slip.... out?

LAODICE.
Ay, Sophron, fall on him.

SOPHRON, *eagerly.*
Yes, yes:
These things shall be, and you shall not complain.

LAODICE.
Nay, go not now; be my great guest this night.
The tide will take you not until more day,
And in the dawn, white hour of clearest thought,
I need more counsel from you for my deeds.
She clasps her hands: Barsine, a Persian, enters.
Let this strong captain be well feasted now
In winy webs of my embroidering—
Or—no—a purple suits his temper best;
And send a slave to him for him to rule.

SOPHRON.
Graciousness, yours: let me but stay my seamen.

LAODICE.
Haretas the Pisidian shall go down
Into the place of ships, but not my guest:
Entrust your ring to this, and she will bear it.
Barsine and Sophron go out. Laodice nods to herself.
I saw his ring: it was a new green scarab.
Danaë ceases fanning without Laodice heeding.

RHODOGUNE, *outside.*

She-dog, come back and you shall have but whips.

A dirty woman runs in, bearing a bundle within her ragged robe; Rhodogune follows her.

LAODICE, *slowly.*

I have not need of rinds and lees to-night;
Come, take these out and burn them.

THE WOMAN.

Ay, come.

LAODICE, *starting up.*

Mysta, MYSTA, my joy! What have you there?
The thing a mother called Antiochus?

To Rhodogune.

Do you not know your fellow and my hand?

Rhodogune retires.

MYSTA.

I was the handmaid of a displaced queen;
I am dry nurse to the undoubted queen,
Come back merely to boast and make display
How lusty a baby grows in careful hands,
How noble I to carry a living king.

LAODICE, *leaping to her.*

Unwind, dishevel, give it up to me.

Clapping her hands.

Let there be lights above: I must see closely.
If I embrace you I shall touch it too.

A woman hangs a lamp from long chains over the gallery on the left, then withdraws. After a moment she passes along the colonnade from left to right and disappears. A moment later she leans from the lattice windows on the right to light two lamps suspended from the roof to a point immediately below her. The lights are such that, when the twilight has gone, the figures of the persons are more definite than their features, and the upper part of the chamber is almost unlit. In the meantime

MYSTA.

Nay, we are but harbour-drift from Antioch:
Come, take us out and burn us.

LAODICE.

Aha, Mysta.

MYSTA.

Touch not my hair; 'tis foul from many ships.

LAODICE.

I have ached by watching ships that were not yours.
Were you in Sophron's vessel? Did he know?

MYSTA.

She did not trust me soon to tend her child,
Returning oft like the uneasy cat
When I have slipt these rags on it and me
I herded with night-women by the shore.
Ere there, I past a rift in palaces,

Moment of empty street and Berenice
Marching with hunger in her bright fixed eyes,
Champing her golden chain—one hand on it
Tugged her mouth downward—one hand smote a spear
Upon the stones as she stepped on and on
Toward the house of Cæneus your known friend.
They spied the harbour; I must leave by land;
Then was some tale of fishers, trading sloops:
Sophron knows not the thief like a fierce mother
Whose hard feet last left ship at Ephesus—
Where Ptolemy is looked for eagerly.

As she speaks, Laodice has drawn a scarf from her shoulders, twisted it and strained it in her hands; it tears and she throws it down.

Mysta holds out the child to her.

'Twas warm and quiet so long. Let it live.

LAODICE, *taking the child and scanning it.*

Let me read here:
This is the mould, wrongly retouched and spent—
It is his child and yet I have not known it....

Clasping it closely to her.

I am the changeless mother of this race,
And this a younger seed. By the opened womb
I have decided being: and I decide.
Much Asia has been spanned to leave it here,
More Asia will be narrowed by her searchers;
Mysta might die next time. It must die.
I reached my hand and took it to make sure

My order and number of children still were true.
I have looked on it—its purport is completed.

MYSTA.
It could be hid for ever: let it live.

LAODICE.
Mysta shall need my ritual bath and wardrobe;
Serve me by delicate sleep. Mysta must go.
She kisses Mysta and leads her to the portal. Mysta goes out passively.

LAODICE.
Danaë, pile me cushions and hollow them—
There in the shallowed seat beyond the breeze.
No; larger cushions with no rough gold in stitchings.
One softer for his head—now hold it there
Till I can kneel and lay him in the dimmest,
For he may sleep a little yet. Ay, so....
I had well nigh forgotten to appoint
Sophron a chamber.

DANAË.
Madam, I will go.

LAODICE.
You speak too loudly. Madam, you will remain:
I need you to cast gums upon the censer
And make me drowsy—I must sleep some moments.

DANAË.
Storax alone, or juniper?

LAODICE.

O, storax.

Danaë goes to a recess in the wall near the portal, and takes out a painted bowl. She pours grains from it slowly upon the brazier; brief cloudy flames illumine her face.

Did the Silk-People shape that bowl?

DANAË.

Maybe....

I could burn up the world like this to-night,
To make an end of conflicts and of burdens.

As Laodice claps her hands Barsine hurries in breathlessly.

BARSINE.

Queen, Queen....

LAODICE, *watching Danaë.*

Make ready fragrantly and freshly
Chamber for Sophron next to that of Smerdis.
Then send Smerdis with knives and drugs to me.

Danaë opens her mouth as if to speak—the flames fall as she holds the bowl poised motionlessly.

BARSINE.

Sophron—none can find him; he has gone.

Danaë lets the contents of the bowl slide into the brazier; a shaft of flame flares high, she averts her face.

LAODICE.

Ho, we are dropping roses all the time?
Men; bring me men and torches and sharp spears—
A boat to cut the Centaur's rudder-ropes—
I will go down and take him back..... Hui....
She sweeps out followed by Barsine.

DANAË.

O, Sophron, out by the land! Nay, he knows more—
And she, and she.... Watch-towers divide this earth,
Horses go here.... And he may save a ship.
She draws aside the curtain to look beyond.
Go, go, my queen, for women's skirts impede you.
She ascends swiftly to the colonnade: a starry night shows her form dimly.
Fishers' small lights, be drenched—you show too much
At height of settling gulls above the water....
Ah....h, nothing, nothing. Something will not happen,
And let this life go on again. Nothing.
Yet.... yet.... the air is beating on my temples
As though a rabble murmured beyond hearing.
Rhodogune enters.

RHODOGUNE.

Danaë, are you here?

DANAË.

I am here.

RHODOGUNE.

Where is the queen?

DANAË.

Nearing the shore by now.

RHODOGUNE.

I have a drunken woman with nine snakes
That follow her as freshets a drowned body,
Then lift wise sibilant heads in guardian swaying;
Her lair could well be traced by emptied streets.
She is too drunk to speak, but sings the better
A praise of poisonous snakes and the fools of wine,
While in the night they circle and streak for answer
Like wineish lines of light, black rubies' gleams.
Shall I not bring her for the queen to use,
Who loves delights like dangers come too near?

DANAË.

Put her away in a safe place till morning—
The queen is smouldering again to-night,
And, if she sees your epileptic mummer,
Will make us tie her up with her own serpents....
Babble no more to me—I must be watching.

RHODOGUNE.

You are not the queen, although the queen's plaything;
Deign not your sweet commandments unto us.

She goes out.

DANAË.

Sophron, your bare grand neck's a tawny pillar

To lean a cheek against in burning noons;
Your careless eyes look deeplier than you know;
You must be kept in life.... Down there, down there
Is something darker, swifter than the sea....
An unseen smoky glare is mirrored now....
That was his boat: he is gone... Sophron, Sophron!
The sea is suddenly empty—and all places.
I have given him to mine enemies. She'll not kill him.
Now I must waken and repent my dreams:
Ay, Sophron, get you gone—I am whole again;
I am the queen's—and O, farewell, farewell.
She descends the stair slowly.
I am the queen's indeed. Is she yet mine.
Ditizele—

A VOICE, *from within the cedar lattice.*

Who is it calls me?

DANAË.

Danaë.

THE VOICE.

Yes?

DANAË.

The queen has spoilt my rose—throw me a young one.
A rosebud falls from the lattice: Danaë sets it in her hair.
Thanks, dear..... She has put up my hair awry—
It will remind her she put up my hair.

She shakes down her hair and knots it again, holding the rose-stalk in her mouth until she can replace it.

These Asiatic nights ruin the hair,
Their humid heat puts out its inner lights —
Mine waves with gleams no more than names of Irân....
Now she has left the shore—Now she will set
Her feet upon the stairs like setting of teeth....
The child cries a little once: Danaë goes to it.
O, baby, the old silence of palaces
Is settling on you steadily. Your crying
Is shut within—and shall be farther enclosed.
One light small cry shows all so much too quiet.

LAODICE, *who has entered noiselessly and comes behind Danaë.*

Ay, do you consort with mine enemies?

DANAË, *wailing.*

Ah.... Ah.... I sickened with the secret thing,
The too faint sound that crept about my neck.

LAODICE, *slipping an arm about her.*

Nay, Rose-Locks, calm thy heart; I did but tease
Thy mothering this lost child, king's waif and surplus.
Rare nurses his: the next will be the last:
Some treachery will ever draw toward him.
Rest you again upon the Persian couch,
And I will sit with you and comfort you.
Leading her to the divan.

Do not forget the cherishing of a queen:
I could not catch your Sophron for you, child.

DANAË.

I was not seeking him: he is better gone.

LAODICE.

Yet such delight to lead him to your arms:
You said you looked at him almost penitently.

DANAË.

Madam, you mock me; I have passed from him.

LAODICE.

Yes, yes; but rapture for your mind severe
Lies in the nearness of wise and powerful men,
As once for famous high Leontion,
That philosophic courtesan your mother.
Let be; but tell me of his quietest scheme.

DANAË.

I know him not: I never knew his mind.

Several women appear dimly at the latticed windows and the gallery.

LAODICE.

Ah, well.... I am tired, and it is your dear turn
To open your arms. Hold me and I will nestle,
Will murmur for you to hear along your neck.
What shall we do to-morrow, Danaë?

DANAË.

Fair mistress, I can dance for you to-morrow.

LAODICE.

Yes, but my dainty cannot dance all day—
She must have long, long quiet for her thoughts.

DANAË.

Then shall I wing the bright and silken birds
About the border of your Persian mantle?

LAODICE.

How should I do without you so many hours?

DANAË.

Your Parthian has a witch of snakes for you—

LAODICE.

I can charm snakes and even pith their fangs.

DANAË.

This is a rare one and, if she is drunken,
Does uncouth things delicious to the senses.
Steep in her wine the herb that makes insane—

LAODICE.

The herb....?

DANAË.

The viscous plant that grows i' your chamber—
Strange longer serpents shall be swiftly snared
And mixt untamed with hers, for you to read
Her gaping and ridiculous tragedy
As the cold perils sober her to pallor.

LAODICE.

It is not novel.... With a secret call
I have turned snakes upon such things before.
I am learned and I need some graver pang—
Something as unsuspected as to tell you
That I had poisoned you three hours ago,
And see you disbelieve—begin to believe.

DANAË.

But you did not.

LAODICE.

There is the disbelief....

A pause.

If I had done so I should here avouch
I could not do it—then await a sign.

DANAË.

Ah, I am yours... You have not doomed me yet.
Queen with the wells of night for human eyes,
Let us descend upon the sea to-morrow,
Rule your own kingdom by your cedarn barge:
We will recline together, hushed as here
Save for the waters' converse just beneath
Permeant as my pulse veiled by your cheek.

LAODICE.

I am uneasy now and should disturb you—
And thence your restlessness would chafe me more
I must make sure that you will lie quite still:
May I so still you? Then you shall to sea.
We'll sail about the limit of the lands
Until you reach the river of Babylon.

DANAË.

So much in one rapt day?
The days of life can never compass that.

LAODICE.

Not in a day, but in a day and night:
Conceive the night, my Danaë, the night—

It is the natural state of being and space,
Briefly interrupted by casual suns.
Much unknown empires are attained in night—
Perhaps not Babylon, yet far enough.
One night can be a very proper length.

DANAË.

You mean that I am poisoned after all.

LAODICE.

Indeed, my Danaë, it is not so.
In this barbaric land, this bright harsh dye-pot,
Peopled by camels and cynocephali
And hairy men of soiled uncertain hue,
O, do you not remember nights of Athens
Built well about with marbles and clear skies,
Wherein your mother and such noble women
Conversed with poets and heroes in lit groves,
And life subtled? Have you not longed for them?
I am sending you to such a farther country,
Away from this shrunk mummy of live earth.

DANAË.

Madam, I know you not—when must I leave you?

LAODICE, *clapping her hands.*

It is the hour, and you shall launch to-night.
Women, women, come hither every woman.
The faces disappear from the upper windows: eleven women appear on the colonnade, some from each side, and descend the stair rapidly.
Get on your knees about us—both knees.

Stand up, my Danaë, be overbearing.
Women, when any woman has a kingdom
And is a regnant being, does it not suit
That in the disposition of her state
Women should figure her and power afar?
This kingdom I control has thrones of cities,
So many that I, when I would sit therein,
Must cast my shadows there: and chief of these
Is Babylon the nest of bygone things.
'Tis to that Babylon I now appoint
My bosom's clasp, my Danaë, for satrap;
She shall oppress among dead queens and gods,
Keep house where sheer dominion walks, command
Enamelled palaces with copper roofs,
Pillars with gardens for their pediments—
Staircase for Anakim in Babylon.
And when ye are as dear to me as she
Ye shall advance upon such larger ways.

DANAË.
O, what is this you do? I am lost in it.

A WOMAN.
But how ? The duplicate queen holds Babylon.

LAODICE.
It shall be mine again ere Danaë's advent. . . .
Danaë, sister of pearls, do I displease you?

DANAË.
Tell out your purpose, though I wreck by it.

LAODICE.

Could higher estate persuade such disbelief?
Barsine, now disburden of its store
The old brass coffer of my inner house—
The gems, the flower-striped silks, the mousselines
Worn by such royal girls of Babylon;
So rare a satrap as we do devise
Must be as Babylonish as her earth.

Barsine goes out.

Put out your hand, young princess, dip your hand
Among these herded common indiscretions,
And gratefully they'll mouth it. Nay, I'll lead you.

SECOND WOMAN.

Madam, remember me when you are mighty.

THIRD WOMAN.

And, O, forget not me.

LAODICE.

Arise you humbled ones, jealous too long;
Take off her Greekish marks of my poor service,
Make ready her precious body to be tangled
In clotted skeins of her affiliate province.

The women strip Danaë of all but her under-robe.

O friend, I do reproach you, for your gay heart
Has surely turned from me too easily
When something in you fades and alters so. . . .
I have done this—my cherished, still keep mine

Barsine enters, her arms heaped with robes.

These be your pretties. Greeks know not to use
Layers of denial—you Persian, can you say?

BARSINE.
These silken trousers tied above the knees,
Yet falling to the feet, are first.

LAODICE.
Ay, so.

BARSINE.
And now this inner gown shrinks close.

LAODICE.
Ay, so.

BARSINE.
Then this brocady robe with fan-flung train
And widening muffling sleeves.

LAODICE.
Can it be so?
Pure Greeks conceive not slavery of sleeves.

BARSINE.
The pointed citron shoes.

LAODICE.
Not even sandals?

BARSINE.
There needs a shawl like gardens for a girdle,
But none was hoarded.

LAODICE.
Put your own on her.
Give me the jewels: I wish to play with the jewels.

BARSINE.

In the horn sphere: press on the metal hands.
The strings of golden tears and yellow stones
Hang hidy in the hair. I will unbind
Your lady's locks and shew you.

LAODICE.

Keep off: I must unloose them,
It is my custom.

DANAË, *in a low voice.*

O, what are you doing?

BARSINE.

Round to the temples, so: this drops upon the brow
That breast of gold—pierced roses, diamond dew—
Curves on the head, no heavier than your hand. . . .
Coils chime upon the ankles—the East walks slowly.

LAODICE.

We come to the necklace.

BARSINE.

Yes, but it is lacking.

LAODICE, *to the Second Woman.*

You white-faced marvel, body of straight lines,
Give me your necklace dropt inside your chiton.

SECOND WOMAN.

O, do you see it? I cannot let it go—
It was my sister's, and she is dead since
Ah . .h . . .

LAODICE.

'Tis well for you it did not strangle you
When caught. But ye are all so envious yet.
There, Danaë, my hands shall finish you.
A painted wonder this I have created—
I am no better than the rest before it,
And I will do my homage, knees and lips.

DANAË, *faintly.*

What is the end, ah me!

LAODICE.

But in true Asia
Great ladies must live veiled; they are too choice
For foreign casual sight.

BARSINE.

This is the veil.

LAODICE.

Bound so beneath the eyes? Show slipper-tips?
Indeed you are ended, Danaë, and shall part.
Farewell! Farewell! Fare delicately! Fare swiftly!
Will you go down by Ephesus, my rose;
Or all the sea?

FIRST WOMAN.

Not Babylon by sea!

LAODICE.

If not to Babylon, yet far enough.
Tie up these arms and bind these feet together;
Bear to the columns and cast her forth to sea,

Where she shall be my satrap of the darkness.
She has been dying many moments now,
She shall have burial as one who ceases
In a strange ship, unfriended on the deeps.

The women laugh.

FIRST WOMAN.

Joy—but wherewith, O Light?

LAODICE.

Your sandal-thongs:
You are good enough to obey me on bare feet.

Several of the women hastily untie their sandals.

FOURTH WOMAN, *kneeling to bind Danaë's feet.*

Forget not me to heel, my mighty lady.

VARIOUS WOMEN, *clustering about Danaë and seizing her.*

Come on, come on to Babylon, dread Madam
Up and down to Babylon, cold Highness. . . .
I'll be her coiffing slave and tend her head. . . .
I'll be her nurse and hold her in my breast
More humbly I will take her feet in mine
What honour to be trusted with such life—
A priceless load Ah, do not let it fall

DANAË, *to Laodice.*

Yet I have served you well.

LAODICE.

Yea, very well.
Whereto did Sophron flee?

DANAË.

I do not know.

LAODICE.

Tell me why Sophron fled, and what he knew.
A pause.
Tell even where your thoughts are following him.
A pause.
Even at what point of my research in him
Your heart lifted, and I will keep you back.
A pause.
Then are you both completed and concluded.
Knot elbows too, and lift her to the columns.

DANAË.

Yet I have loved you.

LAODICE.

You are not mine: this earth shall not contain you.
I could unmake the stars to ensure darkness
To cheat me of the places that have known you.

DANAË.

Must I go out?
Then pay me for my spent devotion first.
Let not these spittly weeds close in and choke me:
Undrape these silks and Asiatic jeers,
Let me go loose, and I will go indeed
As far as your desire—serving you yet.

LAODICE, *severing Danaë's bonds with her dagger, then rending away her veil and upper garments.*

Your rigid mortal bonds, ...

Your isolating veil, ...
Your scarf of earthly flowers, ...
Your robe that once was royal, ...
Your chill, worn-out simarre,
Slide as the world slides
Put off your useless shoes
To enter a holy place. . . .
Get to your high estate.

DANAË, *standing in her under-garment.*
Gather your jewels.

LAODICE.
You trifle to gain moments.

DANAË.
Give me one kiss.

LAODICE.
You have not time.
Indicating the surrounding women.
These wait.

DANAË.
Your house shall be the firmer by your sentence.
She takes the sleeping child in her arms, and mounts the stairs quickly.

SEVERAL WOMEN.
The child, she has the child.

LAODICE.
Yes. And then?

DANAË, *pausing by a column.*

The common run of men make small account
Of high religion: they are very right.
I saved the man my lover and receive
This recognition from the Powers who still
Dispose of us. Laodice killed hers,
And she is held deserving of all that honour.

LAODICE, *pointing at the Fourth Woman.*

Thrust her down, you.

Danaë disappears while the Fourth Woman stealthily mounts the stair. Laodice has thrown herself on the divan, with her back to the colonnade.

To-morrow will be soon.
To-morrow I will sit with men in council,
And muster men to leaguer Ephesus.
These fretting hens, these women, burden me—
I know their eyes too well; let them keep hid.
To-morrow I will walk upon the harbour
And board my ships and see them manned and ready—
No, no, I will not step towards the sea

SEVERAL WOMEN, *as Laodice speaks.*

Ai! Ai! Is she down? Not yet. . . .
I cannot see. . . . No one can see.

SECOND WOMAN, *sobbing in the corner near the stair.*

My necklace!
Save my dear gems!

FOURTH WOMAN, *from the colonnade.*

She is not here. She falls.

LAODICE.

Is that hoarse dashing how the surge receives her?

FOURTH WOMAN

It is the old recession of the waves;
The rocks are bare. No movement could be seen;
No pallor could emerge. There is no sound.

LAODICE, *in a dull voice.*

She has a lulling hand Put me to sleep

Curtain.

"And, O, perchance it is the fairest lot
At once to be a queen and be forgot;
For queens are oft remembered by the weighed
Wild dusky peacock-flashing sins they played,
But queens clean-hearted leave us and grow less,
Lost in the common light of righteousness."

From KING RENE'S HONEYMOON : *a Masque.*
Scene VII.

31 W

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